

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Vol. 33

No. 3

May-June 1993



ANATIDAE 2000

An International Conference on the conservation,
habitat management and wise use of ducks, geese and
swans

STRASBOURG-FRANCE FEBRUARY 1994

Convened by:

The International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research
Bureau IWRB/BIROE

at the invitation of:

The Government of France
Co-operating Organisations (at 10/02/93):
European Economic Community Council of Europe
Ministere De L'Environnement (France)
Office National De La Chasse (France)
Berne Convention Secretariat
Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle (France)
Coaseil International De La Chasse

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

Introduction

This will be the first in a regular series of conferences on the Anatidae, organised by the Research Groups of IWRB, which will continue to be supplemented by more specific technical workshops when necessary. The conference will have a global agenda, but will make specific recommendations for the conservation and management needs of Anatidae in the Western Palearctic.

Audience

This Conference is Specifically aimed at:

1. Specialists in waterfowl and wetland research and management;
2. Representatives of governmental agencies involved in nature conservation and management;
3. Representatives of non-governmental organisations involved in nature conservation and management.

Objectives

The conference will review the existing scientific knowledge on the population dynamics of Anatidae and will evaluate the effectiveness of various conservation and management actions from different parts of the world. The conference will identify gaps in both our scientific

knowledge and conservation policies, and make recommendations for action.

Venue

The conference will take place at the headquarters of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, which offers excellent facilities. Strasbourg is located in the heart of an historic and touristic region, and is easily accessible by air.

Dates

The exact date of the meeting in February 1994, will be announced in the next information booklet. The date will depend upon the European Parliament's programme as well as the Council of Europe's sessions.

Programme

The conference will include: 4 days of meetings; 1 full day's mid-conference excursion; and 3 choices of post-conference excursion of either one, three or four days.

Call For Papers

Those people wishing to present papers or posters should send their application (along with a summary in either english or french-maximum of 200 words).

Paper presentations should summarise existing data and published literature to provide a current review for a particular taxonomic group, research theme, impact or management technique.

Languages

The official languages will be french and english. Oral presentations will be in english or french with simultaneous translation.

Papers should be handed in at the time of registration. Texts will be printed in english or french, with a summary in both languages.

If you would like to receive the second announcement and registration form please contact:

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Cover: **Small Indian Pratincole** (*Glareola lactea*). This sandy grey fluviatile bird with pointed swallow like wings, frequents large placid streams and lakes with sand bars. They breed in large colonies between April and August but strangely disappear thereafter. The entire flock takes off at once, as if signaled by the Group Captain and at incredible speed, wheel, turnabout and loop in unison, like a well synchronised fighter squadron.

Photo: S. Sridhar, ARPS

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Printed and Published Bi-Monthly by S. Sridhar at Navbharath Enterprises, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560020, for Private Circulation Only.

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AWB News

EDITORIAL

Newsletter Index and Nomenclature Booklet

It is our good fortune that Aashish Pittie has produced an index for last year's Newsletters. He has also commenced working on a 10 year index which will be invaluable for us.

We must not push Aashish too hard; but here is a suggestion from Dr. Rajiv Singh Khalsi, Department of Zoology, M.M. College, Yamunagar 135 001, Haryana. He writes: "My suggestion is to compile all the Indian Ornithological literature published in one year in the form of a booklet which can be named Indian Ornithological Review..... A panel of volunteer abstracters can work on the booklet". Well let us see if some volunteers come forward to do the job.

Incidentally, the Booklet on the Nomenclature of Bird Names is making progress and will be published soon. In connection with this booklet R. Jayapal, 77A Rosa Annamalai Street, Gudiyatam 632 602, writes to say that the suffixation of group names, e.g. spotbilled duck and open billed stork to spotbill or openbill should not be abandoned. As far as I know, it is not the intention to do away with group names as a suffix.

21st International Ornithological Congress in Vienna, Austria

If any of you readers intend to attend this Congress, please write to the Secretary General, John Dittami, Congress Secretariat, Inter Convention, Austria Centre, Vienna, A-1450 Vienna, Austria. Although I have never participated in these concourses, I understand that they have always been worthwhile and exciting. From the information sent to me regarding the 21st IOC, I see that registration has to be done before May 31st 1994. I also find that financial aid will be given to limited number of participants. These rates apply to students, senior citizens

or anyone requiring them due to financial circumstances. Travel and accommodation assistance will also be available. I suggest, therefore, that any of you who intend to participate and are in the category of a serious ornithologist, should write in detail to the organisers perhaps with a copy to Mr. S.A. Hussain, Member IOC Committee or OSI, Secretary General, Asha Saklani.

In connection with the Congress, I am informed by B.M. Parasharia, a member of the Standing Committee on Applied Ornithology, that a round table discussion is being organised by the working group on diseases transmitted to people and livestock from birds. For further particulars write to Mr. B.M. Parasharia, Gujarat Agricultural University, Anand Campus, Anand 388 110, (Gujarat).

Proposed Seminar on the Changing Scenario of Bird Ecology and Conservation : 12-14 Nov 93

A preliminary meeting for the conference was held on 12th May 1993, under the chairmanship of Mr. A.N. Yellappa Reddy and several useful decisions were taken

including the formation of the Reception Committee under K.A. Bhoja Shetty; Programme Committee under Joseph George; Souvenir Committee under M.J. Muthanna; Exhibition Committee under S.Theodore Baskaran and Ramachandran V.S.; Press & Publicity under Zafar Futehally and A.N. Yellappa Reddy; Mid-Seminar Field Trip Committee under Abraham Verghese. The catering, transport and accommodation would be looked after by Mr. Ravindran D.S. Forest Department for which we have to thank Mr.A.N. Yellappa Reddy who, apart from his connection with the Forest Department, is now Special Secretary, Department of Ecology & Environment, Government of Karnataka.

A followup was held at the Bangalore Club on 11th June. Convenors of the various Committees presented a report on the progress made.

Postscript : We are glad to announce that Prof.J.C. Uttangi has been given a grant by the OBC (Forktail Leica Scheme) to survey waterfowl in the Mahadayi River Valley in the Western Ghats.

ABOUT THE ROSERINGED PARAKEET IN TIRUCHIRAPALLI, TAMIL NADU

H. DANIEL WESLEY, 126, Ramalinganagar South, Tiruchirapalli 620 017

The Roseringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is a common bird in Tiruchirapalli (10.8°N 78.7°E), Tamil Nadu. Many of the birds can be seen crisscrossing the sky through the day. I have been observing batches of the bird going out early in the mornings from the roosting or/and nesting territories to the feeding areas. Peculiarly, the movement has been from West to East for feeding and East to West for roosting. If this is a general feature it is not known. However, at about 5.00 p.m. on 17, November 1992, waiting for the city-bus by the Periyar Bridge, Madras. I counted 41 Parakeets, in about 10-15 minutes, returning to the Government Estate and over The Hindu from the West and North Western directions.

Singly or in pairs the bird frequents daily my prosopis-fence for the pods and for the fruits of *Cephalandra indica*. I could observe them clearly from the window about four meters away. Impelled by the reference to the bird (Ali, S & S.D. Ripley, 1987), I took closer looks at the bird. As for the sexual dimorphism, the male has a double ring: a black horse-shoe with a median ventral peg that leads to the base of the lower mandible and the free lateral ends thinning out on either side of the neck failing to meet over the nape, the upper gape as broad as the width of the neck. Behind it is the rose-pink border that goes singly over the neck dorsally

to meet the fellow on the other side, closing the ring in the male. In the female there are different degrees of the expression of the ring. Commonly, there is an indistinct emerald green ring round the neck which appears as a constriction, more appropriately, a groove, between where the crown ends and the nape begins. In some there does exist only the black peg without the ring. I have seen a female (a conjecture from the fact of its presence along with a male) having the peg with aborted black-and-rose horse-shoe that stopped in the jugulum itself. There is a black lores-streak below the lateral ledge of the forehead that goes around the latter to connect with a similar one from the other side. The bill has the upper mandible red but with a black tip, and the lower mandible black with a red base. The eye is black with the iris having a white inner ring and an orange-brown outer one. The tarsi and the toes are ashen grey and rough. The middle rectrix is longer and tapering, and bluish with the shaft violet.

In the prosopis the bird takes the pods, and the fruits of the climber. The pods generally are not removed from the tree, the seeds being eaten after the rind being nipped off, held in one foot and bitten off bit by bit, the fruit itself rotated while being consumed so as to give the impression when finished of a spiral course from the base to the apex;

this way the bird secures all the seeds for itself. The bird took more than one fruit at a sitting when undisturbed and enough fruits were available. The time taken by a bird for finishing off a fruit averaged 3 mt 02 sec, the range being from 2 mt to 3 mt 15 sec, the bird consuming in succession five fruits before it made its noisy departure. I have also observed parakeets open up the pods of *Cesalpinia pulcherrima* holding one in such a way as to grip the two sides of the pod flat with the bill and make one half glide over the other with a co-ordinated thrust in the opposite directions of the mandibles, rupturing the pod lengthwise along the sutures and exposing the seeds. This is done without the fruit being removed from the peduncle. One could come across such prematurely open fruits intact in the plants. The parakeet also consumes the oily endosperm and the cotyledons of the neem fruit which is reached after the removal of the rind and crushing the hard shell, the fruit detached and held between mandibles.

On 22, August 1990 a noisy batch of nine parakeets landed on the parapet wall of the neighbouring house. There were two females, and the others males. Except a pair that remained aloof though of the party, six males sat around the other female at varying distances while one of them made lucicrous overtures, 'climbing' as it were the

flat and horizontal wall-top gripping the surface with the bill and taking laborious steps forward. Suddenly they all took off for far west where perhaps was the nesting territory. There was no fight observed between the eligible males, if any. Hence, it is presumed that the dominant among the unmated males is not challenged, or, the challenger(s) vanguished and acquiesced, the swarming is a social ceremony to finalise as it were the choice of the mate, witnessed also by the already paired ones.

In the size of the body, the race appears smaller than the northern-race. It is distinct in the lower mandible being black but not entirely, the upper mandible red except the curved tip which is black. The inconsistency in the nature of the ring in the female is probably indicative of a complex hereditary phenomenon and that in the ancestor both sexes may have sported the ring. The tarsi and the toes are not greenish; they are ashen grey. The iris is not yellow. Further observation must throw more light on its proper texonomic category vis-a-vis the northern race and that of Ceylon. Would there be more than the two races, *P.k. manillensis* and *P.k. borealis* and diverging clines?

Reference

Ali Salim and S. Dillon Ripley, 1987. Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, 2nd Edn., Delhi. Oxford University Press.

BIRDS IN NAINADEVI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY IN SIWALIK HIMALAYAS

ANIL MAHABAL and T.R. SHARMA, Zoological Survey of India, High Altitude Zoology Field Station, Solan (H.P) 173 212

Naina Devi Wildlife Sactuary, 31° 14' N and 76° 30' E, falls in the Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh on Naina Devi range in lower Himalayas (See map). Its area is about 123.5 sq/km. Naina Devi peak is about 1500 m and is the most prominent geomorphic feature of the sanctuary. The vegetation is sub-tropical dry mixed deciduous forest with Khair, Sissoo, Bamboo and scrub at lower levels, whereas Chir Pine forest occurs at higher level. Barking deer, Wild boar, Sambar, Panther, Civet and fox are some important mammals found in the sanctuary.

The survey of avifauna of this sanctuary was undertaken during winter in February 1992. The birds were identified with the help of the Book "A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of Indian Subcontinent" by Ali, S. and Ripley, Dillon S. (1983).

A systematic list of 58 species of birds belonging to different families alongwith their status and abundance is presented herewith. It indicates that out of the total bird species recorded, 34 are resident and most of them show certain local or seasonal movements. Of these, populations of Whitebacked Vulture, Blossom headed Parakeet, Mynas,

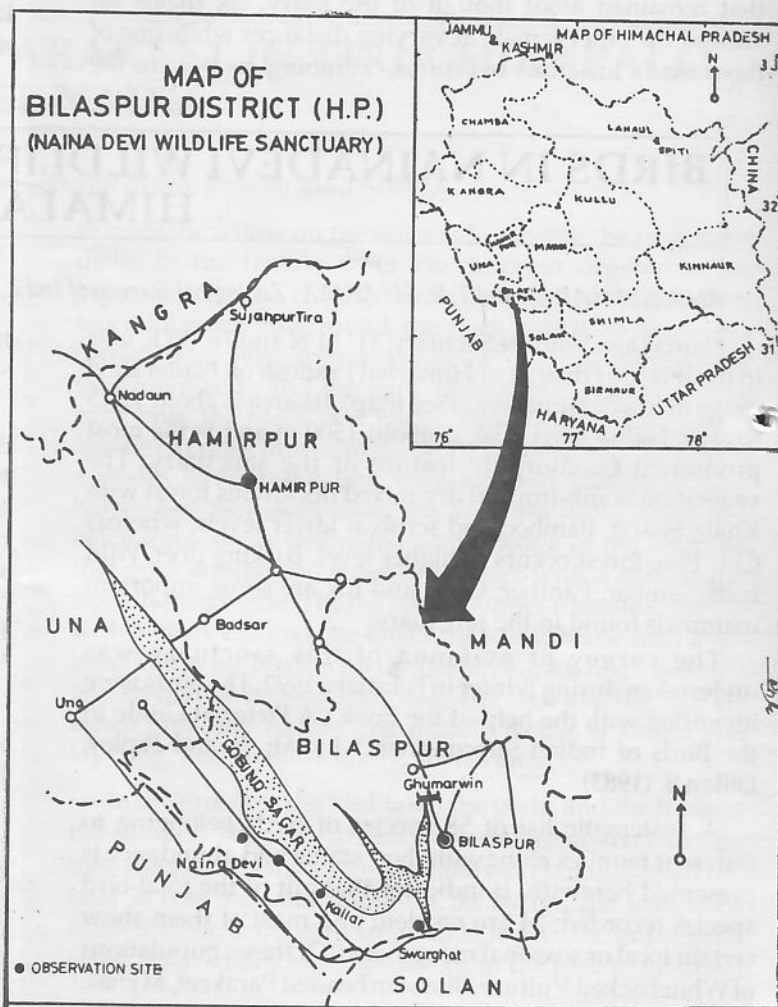
Jungle Babbler and Brownbacked Indian Robin were substantially high as compared to other resident birds.

Several high altitude birds in Himalayan ecosystem descend down towards lower elevations during winter because of heavy snowfall at higher ranges and return back in summer. Eleven such bird species showing vertical movements were recorded in the sanctuary area. As the season of avifaunal survey coincided with winter a number of winter visiting species were also observed. Of these, Brown Flycatcher, Pied Bush Chat, Kashmir Grey Tit and White Wagtail were found in fairly good numbers.

In general, it was noticed that the avifauna of this sanctuary resembled that of the plains of neighbouring Punjab.

(R)	Resident
(LM)	Local Movements
(SM)	Seasonal Movements
(WV)	Winter Visitor
(VM)	Vertical Movements (Winter-Summer)
(*)	Bird confined to Himalayan ecosystem
(+) Occasional	(++) Common (+++) Most Common

Sl. No.	Common Name & Species Name	Status	Abundance	
Class : AVES				
Family : ACCIPITRIDAE				
1.	Pariak Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	R/LM	++	
2.	*Himalayan Griffon Vulture <i>Gyps Himalayensis</i>	VM	+	
3.	Whitebacked Vulture <i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	R	+++	
Family : FALCONIDAE				
4.	European Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	R	+	
Family : PHASIANIDAE				
5.	Black Partridge <i>Francolinus francolinus</i>	R	+	
6.	Red Jungle Fowl <i>Gallus gallus</i>	R	+	
Family : COLUMBIDAE				
7.	Blue Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	R/SM	++	
8.	Spotted Dove <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	R/LM	++	
9.	Little Brown Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	R	+	
10.	Large Indian Parakeet <i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	R/LM	++	
11.	Northern Roseringed Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	R	+	
12.	Northern Blossomheaded Parakeet <i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	R/LM	+++	
Family : CUCULIDAE				
13.	Western Sirkeer Cuckoo <i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>	R	+	
Family : STRIGIDAE				
14.	Northern Spotted Owllet <i>Athene brama</i>	R	+	
Family : APODIDAE				
15.	House Swift <i>Apus affinis</i>	R	++	
Family : CORACIIDAE				
16.	Northern Roller <i>Coccyzus benghalensis</i>	R/SM	+	
Family : CAPITONIDAE				
17.	Bluethroated Barbet <i>Megalaima asiatica</i>	R	+	
18.	Crimsonbreasted Barbet <i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	R	++	
Family : PICIDAE				
19.	Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker <i>Picoides mahrattensis</i>	R	+	
Family : LANIIDAE				
20.	Rufousbacked Shrike <i>Lanius schach</i>	Wintering	+	
Family : STURNIDAE				
21.	Indian Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	R	+++	
22.	Northern Jungle Myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	R/LM	+	
Family : CORVIDAE				
23.	*Himalayan Redbilled Blue Magpie <i>Cissa erythrorhyncha</i>	VM	+	
24.	Nothwestern Tree Pie <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	R/SM	++	
25.	Jungle Crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	R/SM	++	
Family : CAMPEPHAGIDAE				
26.	Sind Wood Shrike <i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	R	+	
Family : IRENIDAE				
27.	Northwestern Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	R	+	
Family : PYCNONOTIDAE				
28.	*Whitecheeked Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>	VM	+++	
29.	Punjab Redvented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	R	++	
Family : MUSCICAPIDAE				
30.	Western Yellow-eyed Babbler <i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	R	+	
31.	Common Babbler <i>Turdoides caudatus</i>	R	++	
32.	Sind Jungle Babbler <i>Turdoides striatus</i>	R	+++	
33.	*Simla streaked laughing Thrush <i>Garrulax lineatus</i>	VM	+	
34.	*Western Blackcapped Sibia <i>Heterophasia capistrata</i>	VM	+	
35.	Brown Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>	Wintering	+++	
36.	Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher <i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	R/LM	+	
37.	Pale strongfooted Bush Warbler <i>Cettia fortipes</i>	Wintering	++	
38.	Tailor Bird <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	R	+	
39.	Paddyfield Warbler <i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	WV	+	
40.	Brown Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	WV	++	
41.	Plain Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus neglectus</i>	WV	+	
42.	Western Pallas's Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>	Wintering	++	
43.	*Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warbler <i>Seicercus xanthoschistos</i>	VM	+	
44.	*Blueheaded Redstart <i>Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus</i>	VM	+	
45.	Pied Bush Chat <i>Saxicola caprata</i>	Wintering	+++	
46.	Dark-grey Bush Chat <i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	Wintering	++	
47.	*Whitecapped Redstart or River Chat <i>Chaimarrornis leucocephalus</i>	VM	+	
48.	Brownbacked Indian Robin <i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	R	+++	
49.	*Himalayan Whistling Thrush <i>Myiophonus caeruleus</i>	VM	++	
50.	*Kashmir Grey Tit <i>Parus major</i>	Wintering	+++	
51.	Tree Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	Wintering	+	
52.	*Upland Pipit <i>Anthus sylvanus</i>	VM	+	
53.	Indian White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	WV	+++	
Family : NECTARINIIDAE				
54.	Purple Sunbird <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	R/LM	++	
Family : ZOSTEROPIDAE				
55.	Indian White-eye <i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>	R/SM	++	
Family : PLOCEIDAE				
56.	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	R	++	
Family : EMBERIZIDAE				
57.	Whitecapped Bunting <i>Emberiza stewarti</i>	Wintering	++	
58.	Central Asian Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniculus</i>	WV	+	



A RECORD OF INDIAN CUCKOO BREEDING IN BANDIPUR, KARNATAKA

J.N. PRASAD and M.S. JAYANTH, C/o. Merlin Nature Club, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560 078

On 21st May 1988, at about 15:00 hours, while we were watching birds in a dry deciduous forest patch, about 3 km north of the Reception centre at the Bandipur National Park (11°40'N, 76°36'E), we were attracted by the clamour created by a pair of Black Drongos *Dicrurus adsimilis* (Viellot). The Drongos perched on a Flame of the forest *Butea monosperma*, were trying to chase a pair of Indian Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus) which probably had come to sip nectar from *B. monosperma* flowers.

Suddenly, one of the drongos caught an insect in an aerial sally and instead of returning to its perch and devour the prey, it flew towards a nearby Amla tree *Embelica officinalis* and fed the insect to a fledgeling cuckoo which was very much larger than the drongo itself. The cuckoo had an overall brownish plumage with a distinct broad subterminal band on the tail. It had a pale or creamy head, nape and throat with broad brown markings on its throat and nape. By referring to HANDBOOK the species was later identified as the immature Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* Gould. Little later, the drongo once again fed the fledgeling with some insect before all three took to wings alarmed by the shrieking call made by one of the drongos. The cuckoo followed the drongos with a typical flight of cuckoos. The behaviour of the fledgeling and feeding activity of the drongo confirmed that the young cuckoo had been fostered by the drongos.

The Indian Cuckoo is a species with a varied status within its distributional range as both migratory and resident populations are considered to co-occur. Its status as a resident elsewhere in south India is unconfirmed (Ali, 1969; Fergusson, 1903). In view of this, the present observation indicates that the Indian Cuckoo is probably resident at Bandipur. Also, during our stay at Bandipur between 21-22 May 1988, the calls of the Indian Cuckoos were commonly heard in the day time. This further supports our claim on its resident status. This sighting also happens to be the first report of the species in the Bandipur National Park.

The Indian Cuckoo is known to be a brood parasite on several bird species according to the HANDBOOK. The present sighting of the fledgeling with drongos confirms the observations of Becking (1981) that Black Drongos are the main hosts of Indian Cuckoo.

References

- Ali, S (1969), Birds of Kerala, Oxford University Press, Bombay, pp : 444
Becking, J.H (1981) : Notes on the breeding of Indian Cuckoos, *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 78 (2) : 202-231
Fergusson H.S. (1903) : The birds of Travancore with notes on their nidification by T.F. Bourdillon part III *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc* 15 : 654-673.

NOTES ON THE STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF WHITEBELLED MINIVET IN KUTCH, GUJARAT

J.K. TIWARI and S. ASAD AKHTAR, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Bombay

This paper attempts to present a chronological history of the whitebellied Minivet's *Pericrocotus erythropygus* (Jerdon) distribution in Kutch, based on faunistic reports from last century up to the present time. (Table 3) The present distribution of the whitebellied minivet in Kutch is mapped on the basis of nine sightings of the bird made by local birdwatchers between 1978-92 (Tab 2) and the Bird Migration study team during January 1990 - February 1992. (Tab 2) The available information indicates that the bird's number has suffered a decline in Kutch. In the light of these observations it is suggested that the species should be given due attention as a locally threatened bird.

Introduction

The Whitebellied Minivet, *Pericrocotus erythropygus*, is a resident species subject to erratic movements in winter, Ali (1945, 1983), Ripley (1982). Its distribution encompasses

peninsular India, southeast of a line from Ambala, Jodhpur and Kutch, south to Belgaum, Hyderabad and east to the Chotanagpur plateau, South Bihar and Southeast Uttar Pradesh. Baker (1922) reported its occurrence in the dry districts of West Bengal. It has also been observed at the foot of the Seegore Ghats in the Nilgiris, Davison (1883). It has been recorded only once north of the Ganges, near Tirhut, Ali & Ripley (1983). Ticehurst (1922), reported that the species does occasionally wander to Sind. He observed a flock of one male and seven females on the Karachi sewage farm, in the first week of January 1991. He also obtained specimens, while the rest were about the same place till 18th February. Ticehurst (1922), describes the nest of whitebellied minivet as small and less ornamented than the peregrinus, he found a nest of the earlier in Khandesh. Whitebellied minivet affects babool, prosopis and butea jungle in broken stony country, Ali & Ripley (op.cit.). It has

Not
recorded

also been reported from semidesert facies interspersed with bushes of *Salvadora*, *Euphorbia*, etc. and open grassy forests in drier regions. Considering its sharply diminished sightings over the last decade a special watch was kept for this species, to assess its distribution and status in Kutch.

Material & Methods

Information was gathered from the local birdwatchers who have been regularly watching birds in this district since the last two decades. To further assess its population we also conducted mistnetting and censuses (Emlen, 1971) on previously laid out transects in its known habitats.

Results & Discussions

Table 1 summarises the sightings of the Whitebellied Minivet recorded between May 1978 and February 1992. The sightings have been mainly restricted to the Nakhtrana, Bhuj and Khadir areas of Kutch district. Maximum number of sightings were recorded in Nakhtrana taluka (Taluka = subdistrict), while areas around Bhuj reported the next highest sighting. This species have also been reported from areas around Mandvi and Anjar.

The sightings have been typically of one or two birds except for a single gathering of three birds (2 Males 1 Female, Table 1). The flock size is smaller in comparison to other species of minivet eg. *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* which also occurs in the area. The hunting party of *P. cinnamomeus* consists of six to twelve birds. Given its preference for open grassy, scrub and bush country, in comparison to other minivet this species is often seen in and around (irrigated fields). Its preference for such areas also exposes it to the insecticides being used here.

This study does not reveal its population in Kutch, though it indicates that the birds range is being restricted, by the uncontrolled lopping and tree-felling by the locals for the purpose of fuel and fodder. Moreover the spread of intensive agricultural activities has destroyed large areas of the tropical thorn forest, which is reported to be its preferred habitat. Climatic vagaries like recurring drought and famine have also played a role in creating unfavourable conditions for its propagation. Our sightings of the Whitebellied Minivet indicates its preference for irrigated fields in scarcity years. These fields act like an oasis in a largely desert biotope and hence attract most of the passerines from the surrounding scrub. This in turn exposes these species to the insecticides being used in these farmlands. This could be one of the reasons of the decline in population of the Whitebellied minivet in the area. Moreover, Kutch being the westernmost limit of its distribution, could also be a factor contributing to its rarity in the district. As species on the extreme range of their distribution are known to be scarce in such regions. Aulen and Allan (1990), while reporting on the demography of a declining Whitebacked Woodpecker population highlighted the general dilemma for students of endangered species, due to their small sample sizes.

Acknowledgments

We are thankful to following persons for their help and suggestion in preparation of this paper, Mr. M.K. Himmatsinghji, S.N. Varu, N.N. Bapat, Trilochan Chhaya.

Table 1
BNHS Team's Sighting of
Pericrocotus erythropygus in Kutch

Sl. No.	Date of sighting	Place	Nos. sighted	Habitat
1	29-09-90	Pakhda Dungar	1 M 1 F	Scrub Forest
2	29-12-91	Moti-Virani	2 M	Irrigated Field
3*	10-01-92	Nakhtrana	1 M	" "
4	01-02-92	Moti-Virani	2 M	" "
5	24-02-92	Mandvi	1 M	" "

* Mr. A.O. Langa Forest Guard's sighting.

Table 2
Mr. S N Varu's Sightings of *Pericrocotus erythropygus*
in Kutch, Gujarat

Sl. No.	Date of sighting	Place	Nos. sighted	Habitat
1	19-05-78	Dholovira	2	Scrub
		Khadir		
2	21-12-86	Lair Reservoir	1 F	"
		Bhuj		
3	30-08-87	Tapkeshwari	2 M 1 F	"
		Bhuj		
4	02-10-89	Sayedpar		
		Reserve Forest	1 M 1 F	"

Table 3
Specimens of Whitebellied Minivet in BNHS collection

Sex	Locality	Date	Donor / Collector
M	Meerut	25.12.1898	Major H J Walton
M	Kutch	12 Dec?	Capt A Newnham
F	-	-	-
M	Sangar	22.02.1889	S David
?	Ajmere	14.10.27	Lt.Col. J W Watson
M	Kuno	15.02.38	Salim Ali
F	Dodi	15.01.38	" "
	Malwa plateau Bhopal		
M	Bodeli	06.11.1945	" "
	Baroda Dt. Gujarat		
F	Malhar Narbada		
	Valley, Bhopal	21.01.38	" "
?	Rapar Kutch	02.09.43	" "
F	" "	" "	" "
M	" "	" "	" "
F	Raipur Melghat	05.02.51	" "
F	Raipur Melghat	05.02.51	" "
M	Delhi	04.02.25	" "
M	Delhi	25.11.24	" "
M	Ambala Punjab	26.02.21	" "
M	Ambala Punjab	05.03.21	" "
F	Bunni, Ladoa		
	Karnal, Punjab	02.01.1916	" "
F	Dhirpur Near		
	Ambala, Punjab	07.01.1917	" "

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NESTING COLONIES OF GREATER ADJUTANT STORKS IN NAGAON AND SIBSAGAR DISTRICTS OF ASSAM

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The Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) has become rare in recent years. Its known populations are scattered and nowhere common. Although a marsh bird, it is well at home among the refuse dumps of the larger towns. In fact, sighting of this rare stork is assured in towns like Guwahati, Nagaon, Tezpur and Sibsagar than in the wetlands. In Assam, the stork is resident with some local movement throughout the Brahmaputra Valley. It is breeding regularly with good concentration at the outskirts of bigger towns. The nesting colonies and trees are used year after year unless destroyed by man. I here report my observations on the nesting colonies located near Nagaon (26° 20'N & 92° 40'E) and Sibsagar (27° 0'N & 94° 40'E) towns of Assam.

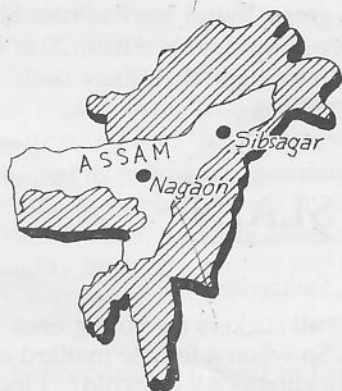
Nagaon

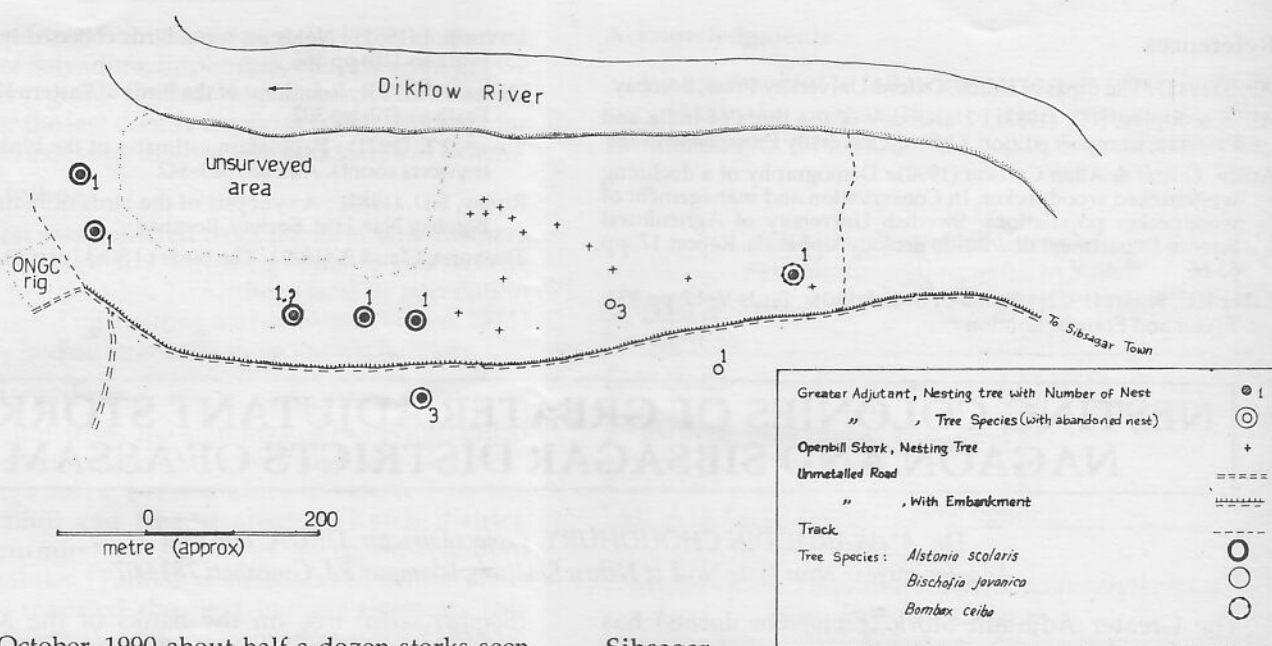
(i) The first nest located in the 2nd week of February 1986, in the heart of Nagaon town. The nests were in a simul

(*Bombax ceiba*) tree on the banks of the Kolong river. Thereafter, in the years 1987 and 1988 I again saw the storks nesting in the same tree. Although I did not recognise them specifically, later on I identified them to be *L. dubius*. Further observations were made in the years 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992. Most of the observations were carried out from moving vehicle and hence, details were not recorded except once.

On 10th January, 1990, I examined the site closely. Only one tree was used as no other tall tree was there. Three nests were there, highest one was 12-13 m above ground while the lowest one was at 10-11 m. Dry leaves and twigs were used in two nests, which were placed on forked branches. One nest was made up of only dry twigs. Two fledglings each in two nests seen. In one nest only one was visible. Adult birds were not there during observation hours from 7:30 to 8:10 am. In the breeding season of 1991-92 I observed nest-building activity on 8.10.91 (which might have started a few days earlier) and nestlings on 14.1.92 (which were a few weeks old). This happened to be the last breeding at this site as unfortunately during a pre-monsoon cyclonic storm the upper half of the tree broke and fell. Then the remaining portion of the tree was cut by the residents of the nearby houses. Any casualty of storks is not known

(ii) In January 1990 I located a fairly large nesting colony in Khutikatia area in the outskirt of Nagaon town. On 24th February 1990, I observed the colony which was actually one large simul tree (30-32m high) with 6+ nests. The nests were built chiefly with dry twigs. In one nest one nestling (with white woolly fur) seen flapping its wings and uttering *ke-ke-ke-ke*. Two fledglings each seen on two nests. Some adults were seen shielding the nests from the sun. Observed from 11.30 a.m. to 12.35p.m.





On 20th October, 1990 about half-a-dozen storks seen alighting, perching and circling over the same tree. They were busy building their nests. On 9th January 1991, I observed the nesting tree from 12.20 to 12.45 p.m. This time nine nests seen, all active. Nests were placed between 25 and 30 metres above the ground. Six nests were seen guarded by one adult bird each. In one nest the young birds were almost in juvenile stage, in the remaining eight they were still nestlings with white woolly fur. The nesting tree is located near dwelling houses and is surrounded by bamboo brakes. The brood size was two nestlings per nest.

Again observed on 6th March 1991, from 9.00 to 9.35 a.m. No birds seen in two nests while in four nests there were two birds each. In the remaining two nests there were one bird each. Most of the immature birds were in juvenile stage. However, in one nest two nestlings were still having white woolly fur but with more black feathers appeared on the wings. Three adult birds were also seen. Some juveniles were seen jumping over their nest with wings spread - trial before flying!

In the same area, a few hundred metre from the main nesting tree, three more simul trees with one nest each seen.

Sibsagar

On 20th January, 1991 a large nesting colony of greater adjutants was found in Dichialgaon near Sibbsagar town. The colony is located along the banks of the Dikhow river covering an area of about 15 hect of trees and bamboo brakes. The same colony is also used by openbill storks for nesting. However, the tree species used for nesting are different from those used by adjutant storks. Details have been given in Fig.2.

Six trees with eight active nests of the greater adjutant stork seen (three nests in one tree and one each in the remainder). In one tree one active nest was visible, while in another tree three abandoned nests were visible. One more abandoned nest was also seen in a tree. About a fourth of the area could not be surveyed, where a few nests might have been there. Of the seven trees having active nests, six were *Alstonia scholaris* (Satiana) and one a *Bischofia javanica* (Urium). The nesting materials used included dry leaves, climbers and grass. Twigs were almost absent. Height of the nests above ground ranged from 20 to 40m. Each active nest had two nestlings/fledglings each. Observed from 9.40 a.m. to 12.05 p.m.

THE SLAYER AND THE SLAIN

AAMIR ALI, 14 ch. de la Tourelle, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland

On a fine sunny day in April 1993, I visited the Nature Reserve of Moulin-de-Vert, on the banks of the river Rhone below Geneva. It has two small ponds, full of reeds and islands. I watched a Moorhen, admiring its black and white back and ignoring the several mallards that were trying to claim attention.

But we are all suckers for young ones - of any species, of any breed. So when a female mallard came along with five young ducklings - 8-9 days old? - I focused on them.

The Mother Mallard led her flock to the bank and they clambered ashore and waddled inland for a while; then about turn, and she led them back towards the water. The

sun shone, the sky was blue, fresh green leaves were making their Spring appearance. And suddenly, before you could say Jack Mallard, this peaceful scene was transformed into one of high drama. A Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* had appeared from nowhere and picked up the last of the ducklings. A moment ago, there had been Mother Mallard leading her brood of five to the water; now there was the Heron, standing on the edge of the pond, tall, upright, grey, with white neck erect and head held high. And in its bright yellow 'dagger-shaped bill' was duckling Number Five, squirming helplessly.

The Heron had the duckling by its body; a long way below, Mother Mallard sat motionless on the water watching but doing nothing else; the four siblings swam swiftly off and disappeared behind some reeds. Father Mallard came drifting along and remained by his wife's side, watching the struggles of offspring Number Five, and also not doing anything else. No sound, no cry, no fluttering of wings, no agitation, no parental lamentation, no calls for the Avian Police.

The Heron stood motionless, unperturbed by the squirmings of the little thing in its bill. It re-adjusted its grip a couple of times, bending down and dipping its prey in the water to do so. In this way, it also prepared its dinner for a smooth passage down its gullet - obviously unaware that it was water off a duck's back. It finally had its victim firmly by the neck. Number Five hung down, waving its legs feebly up and down, looking O, so terribly vulnerable as it exposed its soft underbelly helplessly to the world. All its youthful dignity had been stripped from it; it no longer looked like a bird, but rather like a frog.

A few moments passed - 3 minutes? 4 minutes? who can count the seconds when such high tragedy is being played out before you? then the yellow, dagger-shaped bill was lifted up as if in thankful prayer, and the duckling disappeared down the Heron's throat. You could watch its progress down the long neck - a neck that a few moments ago had appeared graceful in its sinuous length, but now appeared snake-like. Feathers, bill, legs, all went down in one gulp. Father and Mother Mallard still watched intently, making no audible or visible protest. Like people under a harsh totalitarian regime who dare not protest however cruel and unfair the conditions that are imposed on them.

The Heron dipped its yellow, dagger-shaped bill in the water for a second - to drink? to wash it clean? ('A little water clears us of this deed,' as Lady Macbeth said) - and then the tall, haughty bird, now replete and still oblivious of the passively sorrowing Father and Mother Mallard, flew majestically off.

Father and Mother Mallard turned and swam to rejoin Numbers One to Four. Nothing moved; all was quiet. Had there really been a drama? If so, how was it that it had left no trace behind, no spattered blood, no scattered feathers,

no broken bones? One of Nature's constant adjustments had taken place; the hunter and the hunted had known since the beginning of time that this was the way the world turned.

The next day, a dozen herons were shot at the airport. The grass of the airfield was no longer ploughed and this had led to an increase in the numbers of field mice, crickets and insects; these attracted herons. With their habit of standing motionless, they were difficult to spot; they might take off just as a plane was approaching, be sucked into the engines and destroy them. So, though herons are strictly protected, authorisation was given to shoot the dozen or so that haunted the airport.

Amongst them, I am sure, was my heron of Moulin-de-Vert; and as he stood up straight and upright to receive the shot, he murmured, I am the slayer and the slain.

But others immediately took the place of the slaughtered dozen. Experts, asked for advice, found that unlike the 20 or so other species of birds around the airport, herons were not frightened off by planes, and froze rather than flew. The only thing that scared them off was the bright yellow car used by the airport services. So one employee was assigned the job of driving his yellow car at any heron he saw - an implacable, yellow, dagger-shaped car.

'.... its strong bill and powerful neck make its swift thrust lethal, though recalcitrant prey may be stabbed several times before being swallowed. Nearly all food is dipped in water, presumably to "lubricate" it for swallowing?' I learn this from a beautiful book *The Herons of the World* gifted to me by Salim Ali; it was autographed for him in 1979 by the authors and illustrators, and has a foreword by Roger Tory Peterson. This book further tells me that 'Certain items of diet, especially goldfish... and all kinds of fish of interest to the angler, but also turtle hatchlings and terns' eggs have earned the Grey Heron the hostility of man. However, investigation has often shown that the heron does as much as or more good than harm'.

Nature has to be red in tooth and claw. What a mess things would be in if herons suddenly became vegetarians. Were Father and Mother Mallard conscious of this as they silently watched Number Five play his destined role in Nature's food chain?

And did duckling Number Five, as it squirmed and struggled in the implacable, yellow, dagger-shaped bill of the mighty heron, find solace in the thought that it was serving great Nature's purpose? Did it say with its hunter, I am the slayer and the slain?

Notes

RADIAL TERRITORIES OF PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS ON PALMS. SATISH KUMAR

SHARMA, Range Forest Officer, Aravalli Afforestation Programme, Jhadol (F.) Distt. Udaipur, (Rajasthan) 313 702

Ploceus philippinus is a colonial nesting bird. Each nesting male requires a specific space on the crown of the host tree to hang its nests. This space, occupied, is repeatedly visited and defended and is called 'territory'.

While patronizing crowns of some non-palm host trees, the boundaries of individual territories of weaving cocks have no definite symmetry, hence we may call them 'asymmetrical territories' (Fig.1).

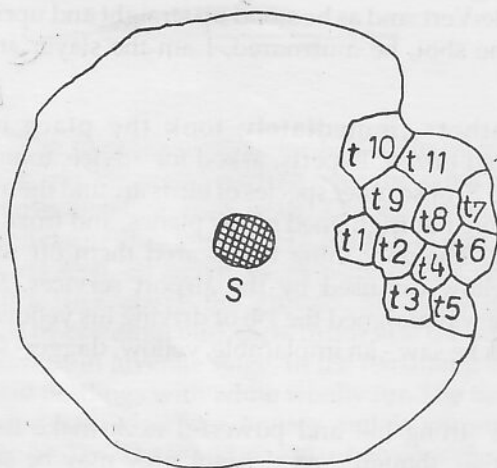


Fig.1 T.S. of crown showing asymmetrical territories of a nest colony of *P. philippinus*. (S=stem; t1, t2 — territories)

When crowns of palms are opted for nesting, there seems to be a tendency in each male to keep himself confined within the extent of a single leaf. Roughly a leaf will be a territory. Sometimes, two or three males (or more?) may use the same leaf for nesting. In small colonies it is possible that two or more closely situated leaves may be occupied by the male, but in large colonies due to paucity of space (i.e. suitable leaves towards side of the crown) more than one cock may occupy the same leaf. As the area of territories coincides with the area of leaves hence 'radial territories' come into existence (Fig.2). Thus the pattern of the territories is more symmetrical on palms like *Cocos nucifera*, *Phoenix sylvestris* etc. which have more or less a radial configuration (i.e. length more than width) of territories. We may call them 'symmetrical or radial territories'.

I observed many nested *Phoenix sylvestris* trees to study the symmetries of territories of weaving cocks in Rajasthan. Observations about one huge nest colony (breeding season 1988) situated near National Highway No.8 at the outskirts of Jaipur city are depicted in table 1 & 2 :

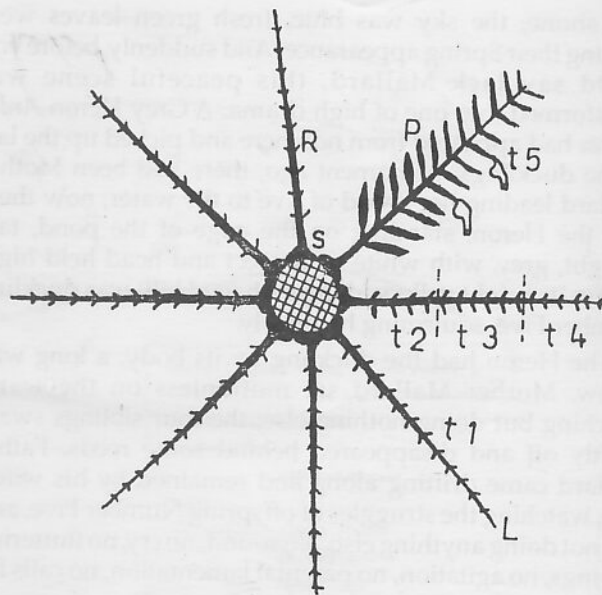


Fig. 2(A) T.S. of crown of *Phoenix sylvestris* and position of territories on leaves.

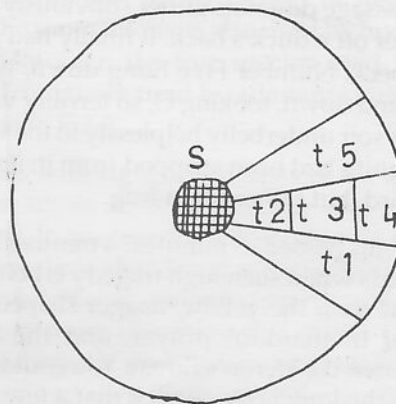


Fig. 2(B) Diagrammatic representation of radial territories on *P. sylvestris* crown. (S=Stem; R=Rachis of leaf; P=Leaflet; L=Leaf; t, t2 — territories)

Table 1
Leaf arrangement pattern of *Ploceus philippinus* on *Phoenix sylvestris*

Total green leaves	Nested leaves No.	%	No. of nests on one leaf	No. of leaves occupied	Total nests
60	52	86.7	1	13	13
			2	9	18
			3	10	30
			4	6	24
			5	5	25
			6	4	24
			7	3	21
			8	1	8
			11	1	11
				52	174
Average Nests per leaf 3.3					

Table 2
Nesting of *Ploceus philippinus* on *Phoenix sylvestris*

No. of male(s) engaging one leaf	No. of leaves occupied	Total No. of males (Territories)	No. of nests	Avg. nests per male
1	41	41	100	2.4
2	6	12	36	3.0
3	5	15	38	2.5
Total	52	68	174	2.5

The rainy season is July to September in Rajasthan when weaver birds breed in the State. Rainy days are limited from 25 to 40 days. During such a small period generally 2 to 4 nests are fabricated by each breeding cock. Presence of five or more than five nests on a single Wild Date palm leaf must be the product of more than one cock.

BREEDING OF YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW. R.G. SONI, Chief Conservator of Forests, Indira Gandhi Nahar Pariyojna, Bikaner 334 001

The yellow-throated sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis* breeds in good numbers in western Rajasthan. I have seen it nesting around Bikaner during the last three years between March and July. It generally nests in holes in Khejari *Prosopis cineraria* trees from 2.5 to 4 metres above ground level. However, I had also seen it nest in hollow cement fencing posts (pipes) during 1992 and 1993. The nest was placed about 25 cm above the ground level and 75 cm below the top of the hollow fencing pipe. The nest was lined with feathers.

It was a chance sighting on 11.4.93 at 8 am that I happened to notice a female sparrow carrying feathers for nest building. There were no eggs in the nest.

On 15.4.93 also there were no eggs.

On 18.4.93 at 8.00 am there were two eggs, perhaps the first egg was laid on 17.4.93 (or it could have been laid on 16.4.93 also?). Perhaps one egg was laid each day.

On 27.4.93 there were four small, roundish eggs which were, as I could discern in the dim light filtering through, having brown spots.

On 1.5.93 at 7.45 am there were two tiny hatchlings, which I could see when in response to my whistle they raised their heads and opened their orangish mouths. I guess the first egg hatched on 30.4.93 and the second on 1.5.93. Thus the incubation period was around 14 days.

On 5.5.93 there was only one chick and no eggs or egg shells. I have no idea what could be the cause of the death of the others. It moved its head with open mouth on my whistling, hoping to get food. It also gave very feeble calls "Si si si". The feed brought was not visible in the bill of the female.

On 8.5.93 the chick had grown, and had also stopped responding to my whistles - remaining completely still. It had light greyish brown colour.

On 15.5.93 it started calling a bit loudly when it was being fed and also when it heard the calls of the male nearby. Between 7.15am and 8.15am eighteen feeds were given, out of which five feeds were given by the male. Various types of insects were brought from up to 200 metres distance. After feeding, the female once carried the pale dropping of the chick in its bill and flew off about 200 metres away to dispose it. When the male did not bring the feed, it accompanied the female and sang persistently "chirp-chap", often coming before the female and leaving after it. The birds were not shy and tolerated my presence as close as 4 meters.

On 17.5.93 the chick was still there, being fed by both parents. It gave a bit louder calls now - resembling a little with the calls of the female - "Chirror chirror".

On 19.5.93 at 7.30 am there was no chick in the nest. But I did see a young one with a pair of Y.T. Sparrows near the nest. The young one looking like the female, having pinkish bill and a bit small in size. It was flying well. Perhaps it had left the nest on 18.5.93. Thus the fledging period comes around 18 days. If the surviving chick was the one which hatched last, around 3 May, it could be even 16 days.

I had also seen a pair of Y.T. Sparrows nesting in similar hollow cement fencing post at the same location during June, 91. I have often heard and seen large numbers of Y.T. Sparrows near Bikaner between February and August.

DISTRIBUTION OF DIFFERENT RACES OF THE SPOTBILL DUCK IN ASSAM. ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY, Near Gate No.1 of Nehru Stadium, Islampur Road, Guwahati 781 007, Assam

Three subspecies of the spotbill duck occurs in assam, they are the nominate race *Anas poecilorhyncha*, the Burmese race *A.p. haringtoni* and the eastern grey duck *A.p.zonorhyncha*.

The known eastern limit of the nominate race *poecilorhyncha* was western Assam (Handbook 1:157), approximately west of 92°E Longitude. However, subsequent surveys revealed that it extends up to eastern Assam also, during winter. On 14th March 1991, I observed some 80 such ducks (with prominent red spot on each side of the base of the bill) in Rohi beel of the proposed Bordalani Sanctuary (border of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts, 94°25'E). Afterwards I examined some of the photos shot by me in Sibasagar Tank in 1987 and 1988 and found that those were also of the nominate race. Thus the new eastern

limit of distribution of the race *poecilorhyncha* is Sibsagar town, where the tank is located (94°40'E).

The Burmese race *haringtoni* was known from Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh (Handbook 1:159). In 1987 I saw ducks of this race in Sibsagar district where it breeds in the wetlands of proposed Pani-Dihing bird sanctuary. This race appears to regularly haunt the rivers also. On 23rd March 1991 I observed four groups totalling 85 ducks (largest one with 60 birds) on the Brahmaputra river near Matmora in Lakhimpur district.

The eastern grey duck (*zonorhyncha*) was recorded in Sibsagar (Handbook 1:160). Although I might have overlooked it on many an occasion, on 17th March 1991, I saw four ducks in the D'Ering Sanctuary of Arunachal Pradesh near Assam border. The ducks were on the Siang river. They were lacking the red spot on the bill and looked different from the Burmese race observed elsewhere. Their head and throat were contrastingly buffy. They were most probably *A.p.zonorhyncha*.

UNUSUAL NESTING BEHAVIOUR OF HOUSE SPARROW. J.K. TIWARI, Field Biologist, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Bombay

The House Sparrow *Passer domesticus indicus* Jardine & Selby is most common, abundant, confiding and widely distributed species. It breeds throughout the year and its nesting habits are well known. The nests of this bird are generally located in and near human habitations in buildings, wells, lamp-posts, etc. At times when nesting sites are not available these birds are known to build nests on trees. This species generally does not indulge in communal nesting behaviour and each pair guards its nest as also its territory with great zeal against intrusions from its own kind. This colonial nesting has not been often observed in India. It has however been recorded elsewhere such as in Karun district of Mesopotamia (as it was known then, J.B.N.H.S. Vol.28, p.230) by Zarudny who recorded 29 nests of *Passer domesticus biblicus* in a small bush. In Karachi Mr. Humayun Abdulali has reported at least 5 pairs having nested amongst the dried leaves of a palm drooping against the stem, forming a pad (J.B.N.H.S. Vol.52, p.601). Mr. Himmatsinhji informed me that he found this bird breeding on a *Prosopis chilensis* tree on a border post in the Great Rann of Kutch of February 25 (1968). There were about a dozen nests. According to his observation there were no traditional nesting sights available there to accommodate the number of birds present. Of course Stuart Baker ('The Nodification Of Birds Of The Indian Empire' Vol.111) mentions that : "Occasionally the House-Sparrow makes a large ball-shaped nest which he places in the dense foliage of a tree or bush."

On August 1 (1992) I found 7 nests of *P. domesticus* on an *Acacia nilotica* tree near the bus-stand and 4 nests on the same species of tree near a petrol pump in Nakhatrana town (Kutch district, Gujarat). All the nests were in active use. They were untidy and bulky in appearance with straws and rags hanging from the branches on which they were located in the inner canopies of the trees concerned. At both the places the trees are full of dense spider webs. The parent sparrows fed their broods on the leftovers of the eatables thrown away by passengers at the bus-stand and the nearby tea-stalls. The possibility of supplementing this diet with insectivorous food in the rainy season as also collecting insects from around the road lights at night cannot be ruled out. I have not had the opportunity of observing this yet.

Though this is not completely an unusual habit as such, the question arises from the above quoted observations on the communal tree-nesting examples of *Passer domesticus* that why should those birds in a city like Karachi and the small town of Nakhatrana choose to nest on trees when ample traditional sites for breeding are available; and the other point which arises out of this phenomenon is that could this be an example of some of these birds reverting sporadically to some former tendency of communal nesting?

POND HERON FORAGING ON EARTHWORMS. RASHID H. RAZA, 15, Morrison court, Aftab Hall, Aligarh muslim University, Aligarh 202 002, Uttar Pradesh

In September 1990, for four days, I observed a group of 4-5 pond herons *Ardeola grayii* Sykes, foraging on earthworms, near the campus of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (27°54'N & 78°06'E), Uttar Pradesh.

Ali & Ripley (1983), Hancock & Kushlan (1984) and Mathew et al (1980) do not mention earthworms among the food of pond heron, though leeches have been reported as a food item. Pond Herons were observed by focal animal sampling (Altman 1974) on four days of different weather conditions. All observations were taken between 0830 hrs and 1100 hrs.

The highest numbers of earthworms eaten were 42 in 60 minutes of foraging on 18 September, followed by 34 earthworms in 92 minutes of foraging on 16 September. Insects also constituted a large share of the prey except on 18 September when the birds fed exclusively on earthworms during observation period. The proportion of insect prey increased with cessation of rains and beginning of relatively drier conditions. The birds energetically pursued flies, more than once grasshoppers were caught, once a dragonfly was taken. Large prey such as dragonfly and grasshopper were battered before being eaten. One

large grasshopper was battered for 4 minutes before being swallowed. On hot days the birds frequently drank water after swallowing large items or rinsed them in water before swallowing. Frequently raised lump of mud was used as a vantage point to watch for the movement of earthworms. Large earthworms, as they emerged on surface were first torn into pieces and swallowed before finally dragging out the remnant.

Manson & Lefroy (1912) considered Pond Heron as useful to agriculture. Mathew et al. (1983) agreeing noted that it also took large quantities of useful insects. The economic importance of earthworms in agriculture is well known, their occurrence in the diet of Pond Heron sheds new light on the role of this species in agriculture.

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NESTING COLONY OF BANK MYNA IN PANIDIHING. DR. D. BAROOAH, Dass Pharmacy, P.O. Sibsagar 785 640, Assam

In the winter, when the wetlands of the Brahmaputra river-system of the plains of Assam invite large number of migratory waterfowl from the North, the uncommon residents are apt to be missed by an observer. That is why a trip was made on 31.5.92, before the onset of monsoon, to the wetlands of Panidihing (27°10'N x 94°40'E approx).

However, a shower of pre-monsoon rain made my birdwatching unprofitable, so I sheltered below a lone *Ficus bengalensis* in the seasonally flooded grassland of Panidihing till I trained my field glasses on a herd of 14 buffaloes grazing at a distance of 50 meters.

Apart from a lone King Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*) riding on the back of a grazing animal, 12 Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*) were seen on and around the herd actively feeding on insects disturbed by the animals. A few were seen flying low towards the river bank. The red patches around the eyes and the yellow bill were noticed on the first casual look. Closer observation resulted sighting of the light yellow field marking at the side of the closed wings and the tuft of stiff hair like structure at the forehead. The latter was akin to that of the Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*) and so also were the size and colour of the body feathers of the species.

Unlike the Bank Myna present elsewhere in India, and described by Ali, the species found in Upper Assam was shy of human beings and kept a respectable distance of 30 metres. It was insectivorous as stated earlier and didn't respond to our offering of chapaties and biscuit crumbs.

Nesting colonies were discovered at steep river banks made of highly decomposed and friable soil. Nests were horizontal tunnels roughly a metre long, the ends turning to either sides, suspiciously similar to that of the medium sized members of the *Alcedinidae* (Kingfisher) family. Further investigation was not attempted as the birds were breeding.

Other members of the *Sturnidae* family have been noticed to use holes, either natural or made by other species of birds, for nest building. Good examples are Jungle Myna and Greyheaded Myna (*Sturnus malabaricus*). Could it be that this small population of Bank Myna took over the nests dug and used by kingfishers in the early winter? The bird seems to be ill equipped to dig such long tunnels. Moreover, no fresh earth deposits were noticed below the mouth of the tunnels.

The total number of nests located was 19 and the number of the species in one sq.km area was around 70. Estimated population 200.

The eastern limit of the geographical location of the Bank Myna is stated to the Bangladesh by Ali in "The Book of Indian Birds". A. Chaudhury in 1988 reported its presence in the wetlands of Panidihing. However nesting habit of the species in Upper Assam was not described before. Bank Myna is an uncommon bird of Upper Assam and is not seen anywhere else except Panidihing.

By the 2nd week of June, river Disang was in full spate. It was not possible to visit the nesting colony because of the monsoon slush; but it was unlikely that all the nestlings would be fully grown to be able to leave nests before the flood. This may also be the cause of the small number of the species in Panidihing.

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SIGHTING OF GREEN BARBET AND NESTING OF PIED MYNA AT JAIPUR. DR. ASHOK KUMAR SHARMA and KR. RAJPAL SINGH, D-67A, Sawai Madho Singh Road, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016

On 10th March 1993, at about 0730 hrs, we were watching birds at the Khatipura Grass-farm Nursery of the forest department. We heard typical loud-Ku-troo ...ku-troo... call of the green barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*, which we immediately identified as we have heard its call

very frequently at Mount Abu. We located it sitting on the highest branch of a large neem tree *Azadirachta indica*. After this we are regularly hearing this bird in the same area.

Green barbet has never been reported from Jaipur before. We are going to this particular grass farm for the last six years but never heard this bird. From Bharatpur also green barbet has not been reported.

According to the Handbook of the Birds of India & Pakistan by Salim Ali & S. Dillon Ripley "Has become conspicuously common and abundant in New Delhi during the last forty years due to increase in wooded gardens and roadside avenues with large ficus and other fruit bearing trees in the process of the city's development as India's metropolis. But is not a new arrival in the area as often believed, being described as 'common' in the (old) Delhi environs even in 1893 (J. Moray Brown in Stray Sport)".

Pied myna *Sturnus contra* was not common at Jaipur twelve years ago (Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol.21, No.12, Dec.1981, Page 8). But now for the last few years we are watching its nesting in Jaipur City and its environs more and more frequently. We have seen its nest on trees, electric and telephone poles, mostly from April to August.

CHARACTERISTIC WAY OF DRINKING WATER BY DOVES AND PIGEONS. SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Arboriculturist, World Forestry Arboretum, Jaipur 302 004

The Order Columbiformes includes Sandgrouse, Pigeons and Doves. These birds are characterized, among other things, by their method of drinking water which consists, not like the domestic hen of dipping the bill to suck and raising the head to swallow, but like a horse - a continuous uninterrupted sucking with the bill kept immersed (Ali & Futehally, 1978). These birds adopt two different patterns of drinking water as follows :

1. Pond with deep water near bank :

At such places, where water is more than 3 inch deep near the bank, Doves and Pigeons do not enter into the water, but they drink without entering the water, or wetting their feet.

2. Pond with shallow water near bank :

At such places, where water is less than 3 inch deep near bank, Doves and Pigeons freely enter into water beyond the water line, go knee-deep, and then start to drink. But it is strange that at such places Parakeets, Peafowl, common Myna, Bank Myna and House Crow generally do not enter into the water but get water at the waterline itself.

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COURTSHIP DISPLAY OF BLACKWINGED KITE DR. ASHOK KUMAR SHARMA, D-67, Sawai Madho Singh Rd., Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016.

In Jaipur district, I have seen nests of blackwinged kites *Elanus caeruleus* from July to October. The blackwinged kite is one of the commonest birds of prey near about Jaipur. The spread of agriculture has helped it a lot. During winter kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) are as common as blackwinged kites. The Buzzard (*Buteo* sp) is less commonly seen than the kestrel and the blackwinged kite. All other birds of prey are uncommon birds.

Wild, twisting courtship chases are frequently seen in the blackwinged kite. Sometimes undulating flight accompanied by lots of "screaming" is seen. I have frequently seen this bird flying about 20 to 25 m above the ground then dipping down to about 15 m and then going up to come down again. This may continue for sometime. All along it keeps making a variety of "screaming" calls.

Once I saw a pair engaged in the usual courtship chasing. One bird was flying a few metres above the other. This bird descended with pendant talons. The bird flying below rolled on to its back and touched the extended talons of the bird descending above it. In another instant it righted itself and then flew into a thick Khejari (*Prosopis cineraria*) tree.

The other bird sat on the nearby tree watching the bird in the Khejari tree. It flew above this tree three times trying to locate its hidden mate. Then it dashed headlong into the Khejari tree chasing out the hidden bird. Then, both birds flew away. During this period one of the birds was making whistling sounds very similar to human whistling. I was not able to make out which one was whistling. Touching of the talons occurred about 10 m above the ground.

OCCURRENCE OF WESTERN AND SATYR TRAGOPAN. DR M.L. NARANG, Dept. of Silviculture & Agroforestry, University of Horticulture & Forestry, Nauni 173 230, Solan (H.P)

I read with interest the report on new sightings 'On the occurrence of Western and Satyr Tragopan together in U.P.' by S. Narendra Prasad in Vol. 33 (1) of the Newsletter.

In 1989, I had the opportunity to survey the areas around Larot and Dodra-Kwar for Western Tragopan. These areas are located on either side of Chansil Dhar (Dhar means ridge) in Shimla district of H.P. and are situated N-W of Kotigad and Sandra forest ranges of Uttarkashi district in U.P. At both the localities I received similar reports about Western and Satyr Tragopans as reported by Mr Prasad. The villagers could differentiate between Western and Satyr Tragopan when shown photographs

and were sure about their existence in the area. But unfortunately I couldn't locate any bird or hear calls during my ten days trek in the area. There are extensive forests of Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), Blue Pine (*Pinus wallichiana*) and Fir (*Abies pindrow*) on the Larot side of the dhar. On the Dodra side I found mixed forests of coniferous and broad leaved species.

Further west in 1988, I found positive evidence of Western Tragopan near Sarahan Bushair in Shimla district and at village Barua in Sangla Valley of Kinnaur district. Near Sarahan Bushair, I heard calls of Western Tragopan whereas at village Barua, I found a portion of skin of a male Western Tragopan in the custody of a temple. But there were no reports of Satyr Tragopan in either of these localities. It appears that areas east of Pabar river - Rohru tehsil, Dodra-Kwar in Shimla district of H.P and Tons forest division in Uttarkashi district of U.P is the overlapping zone of these two species. But it needs further verification. The results of my above mentioned surveys were submitted to the Fifth International Pheasant Symposium held at Lahore, Pakistan in September, 1992.

FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF COOT AT AAKULAM LAKE, KERALA. C. SUSANTH KUMAR, Prakriti, Perurkada Post, Trivandrum 695 005, Kerala.

Coot *Fulica atra* is a rare bird of Kerala. Distribution of Coot in Kerala is not well known. In Northern part of the State it is a winter visitor (local migration) and in Southern part it is a monsoon bird (more information is needed). Coots are to be found in a number of the larger jheels and marshes, but generally in the cleared parts and sometimes in the company of Moorhens, Koras, and teals.

On 11th June 1992, I had rather an unusual opportunity of watching 3 Coots (mature birds) with 9 chicks at Aakulam lake (Kerala). Aakulam lake is one of the major winter quarter and breeding place of rare water birds of Kerala. It is situated 13 km. from Thiruvananthapuram city (capital of Kerala).

It was a rainy day, I and my nephew Ayyappan were watching a curious hunting party of Purple Moorhens, Indian Moorhens, Pheasant tailed Jacanas, Bronzewinged Jacanas, Little Grebes, and Watercocks (Koras) near a mud flat. A little later 3 Coots (mature birds) accompanied by a group of Little Grebes, and Cotton Teals arrived from the Western corner of the lake. The Coots led the procession, Little Grebes and Cotton Teals followed. Suddenly I saw 9 small birds swim very close to the Coots. After careful observation through binoculars I could make out the colours of the small birds. The forehead and half portion of the beak was red, the tip of beak was pale yellow and the

remaining part of the body was bluish black. These small birds were the chicks of Coot. While the adult birds were wading through the slush, the chicks swam after them, and Cotton Teals and Little Grebes swam around the chicks as body guards.

I can now confirm that the breeding of Coot *Fulica atra* at Aakulam Lake is the first breeding record of Kerala.

NESTING AND FEEDING THE YOUNG AMONG REDVENTED BULBULS. DR B.V. Seshagiri Rao, Department of Zoology, D.N.R. College (Autonomous), Bhimavaram 534 202, Andhra Pradesh.

During summer 1991 a pair of Redvented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) started investigating the creeper covered portico of my house. They finally selected a place in the intricately woven creeper, *Verononia eleagnifolia* (curtain plant) and started building a nest. The nest was located about eight feet from the ground. Finally it was a cup shaped nest and three eggs were laid. The location of the nest was exactly opposite the main door, facing east, making it easy for regular observation.

Subsequently, I observed that the young ones were being fed with a crimson coloured material by the parents. I was very surprised at the bright colour of the food. I could clearly observe the food being pushed into the mouths of the nestlings. I went on to the terrace to investigate and I noted that they were feeding the young with the flower petals of *Delonix regia*. The feeding was regularly observed for about a week.

At the approach of summer 1992, a pair of bulbuls added another cuplike structure fitting into the old one. Eggs were laid, hatched and again they fed the young with flowers of the same plant *Delonix regia* (Gul Mohur).

Correspondence

SCAVENGING BY CATTLE EGRET. J.S. SERRAO, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road, Bombay 400 023.

Nothing comes amiss by way of food to the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (Salim Javed, NLBW 33 (2): 38). It is a common sight to see them stealing a morsel by pecking at an animal carcass at dumping grounds, amidst the feasting concourse of kites and crows. Feeding on maggots infesting a decomposing carcass is one more pastime the bird engages into in flocks. Human odure is yet another item avidly fed on.

A recent mode of feeding the Cattle Egret has taken to is by stealing tid-bits from a fish woman's basket. For doing so they freely enter fish markets habitually around Andheri and Versova in Bombay. I have seen them collecting at

spots where fish is dynamited in rivers, and swooping down from the air, pick up a tid-bit and carry it to the bank for doing justice.

A quaint item of vegetable item in the bird's dietary, I came across, is the capsule of the Banyan tree (*Ficus bengalensis*). A flock gathers on a laden banyan and diligently searches amidst the foliage. Selectively picking up the capsules the bird manoeuvres the capsule in its beak held upright, and gulps down the capsule with pulsating movements of its throat.

STATISTICS A VALUABLE TOOL. DR Asha Chandola Saklani FA Sc, Professor in Zoology, Post Box 45, Garhwal University, Srinagar, Garhwal, U.P. 246 174.

This has reference to your quote from Sandy Hill's letter of 19 March (Editorial Vol. 33 No. 1). May I humbly submit that statistics to the biologist is a tool which he/she uses extensively to distinguish the subjective from the objective. Getting drunk on one's tools i.e. using the tools as an end and not a means is not a characteristic of biologists but is a common folly committed by us humans in all spheres of life. It is, therefore, not fair to label the biologists with this trait for they too may have their share of 'sensible' and 'drunk' guys. Christ is not judged by the deeds of Christians or for that matter Hinduism by the deeds of a handful of Hindus!! The scientific community is so strict in this matter that, through an unwritten rule, the day a biologist lets his tools go to his head he is considered an outcast losing his status as a biologist in the truest sense of the word.

BIRDING IN GREAT BRITAIN : FROM A BIRDWATCHER'S DIARY. H.S.A YAHYA, Sr. Lecturer, Centre of Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002.

In 1992 I visited part of Scotland and England and besides participating in other activities I was able to observe a good number of waterbodies and birds. I hope the members of NLBW may enjoy going through the account.

After the initial running between Delhi and Aligarh several times, I got the approval of the UGC in the last week of January 1992. Since I had to attend a course in the University of Aberdeen from 10th Feb I left India on the 8th morning. Contrary to the expectations, when I landed in London the sun was bright shining and the weather was very good. I had been warned earlier by various well wishers that "London weather is unpredictable" and I was a bit afraid of that, but mentally prepared to enjoy every thing. Therefore I enjoyed not only the first sunshine in U.K. rather the entire 12 weeks; though it rained, snowed, breezed very cold at times but fortunately I had no problem whatsoever.

I reached Aberdeen on the 9th evening and was provided a very comfortable accommodation in Johnston Hostel. It was indeed very interesting to become a full time student after 16 years! And I enjoyed and tried to benefit as much as possible.

The course started from 10th of Feb and since I had done my Ph.D research work in a Tropical Rainforest in India, I enjoyed the course on 'Tropical Rainforest Ecology and Conservation' thoroughly. In fact among the 32 students in the course I was the only student who had already worked in any Rainforest.

While attending the theoretical classes on Rainforest Ecology organised by the Department of Zoology, I also participated in the field work on 'Geese problems' with Dr. Ian Patterson of the same department. After the module course was over, I stayed at Loch Strathbeg (40 miles north of Aberdeen) for 10 days to participate in the field work more intensively. Strathbeg is probably the best wetland in Scotland manned and managed by the RSPB.

During this period I used to participate in the following field activities :

- a) Counting of droppings of Geese to find out their density.
- b) Putting in Fertilizers in the Grass field to monitor whether Geese preferred fertilized or unfertilized field.
- c) Monitoring Geese intensive feeding areas for experimenting the scaring devices.
- d) Counting the Pinkfeet Geese/Swans in the early morning (sometimes as many as 17000 Geese).
- e) Putting up traps to catch some Geese for satellite monitoring on their way back to nesting ground.

Besides these activities I observed some very interesting and new species of birds and mammals (appendix I and II).

After two month stay in Aberdeenshire I moved to Dumfriesshire on 30th of March and reach Caerlaverock on the same evening. Caerlaverock is a beautiful wetland famous for Baranle Geese: managed by Waterfowl and Wetland Trust Slimbridge. After one day familiarization/reconnaissance I started reading of rings on Baranle Geese. I had to fill a specially designed form precisely noting down the profile of the Geese, flock number, its position in the flock and number of goselings. During my three weeks stay at Caerlaverock I could read 160 rings. I used to count the Geese and read the rings by Telescope when they were close and when weather favoured. I enjoyed the work and place and also saw several new species of birds at Caerlaverock (Appendix-I).

There are several beautiful lochs (lakes) around Dumfries where one day's birding is lifelong memory for a birdwatcher.

The last visit in my link schedule was of Slimbridge in Gloucestershire. If U.K. can be called as Mecca of Ornithology in the World, Slimbridge is surely Mecca for birdwatchers within U.K. It is a wonderful place discovered and designed by equally wonderful man late Sir Peter Scott. One can realise the achievements of this great man after reading his autobiography "The eye of wind". He was indeed a determined man and did everything very perfectly. Slimbridge is a novel example of his vision. The place is well kept and many species of Waterfowl from throughout the world are bred in captivity. The most remarkable achievement being the successful release of Hawaiian Geese. Besides observing birds and management practices, during my one week stay at Slimbridge I have had very useful discussions with various scientists working there. As a follow up action recently I have carried out a survey on habitat and status of the whitewinged wood duck in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is

APPENDIX-1

Species	Aberdeen-shire	Strathbeg	Caerla-verock	Slim-bridge
Little Grebe	+	+	—	—
Great Crested Grebe	—	+	—	—
Fulmar	—	+	—	—
Gannet	—	+	—	—
Cormorant, Large	+	+	+	+
Shag	+	—	—	—
Grey Heron	+	+	+	+
Baranle Goose	—	+	+	+
Brent Goose	—	—	+	+
Canada Goose	—	—	+	—
White Fronted Goose	—	+	+	+
Greylag Goose	—	+	+	—
Pink Footed Goose	—	+	+	+
Mute Swan	+	+	+	+
Whooper Swan	—	+	+	+
Bewick's Swan	—	—	+	+
Shelduck	+	+	+	+
Mallard	+	+	+	+
Teal, Common	+	+	+	+
Gadwal	+	+	+	+
Wigeon	+	+	+	+
Pintail	+	+	+	+
Shoveller	—	+	+	+
Pochard	—	+	—	—
Tufted duck	+	+	+	+
Scaup	—	—	+	—
Eider	—	+	—	—
Golden Eye	+	+	+	+
Smew	—	+	—	—
Redbreasted Merganser	—	+	—	—
Goosander	+	+	—	—
Muscovy Duck	—	—	—	—
Seen in Wakfield				
Common Scoter	+	+	+	+
Buzzard	—	+	—	—
Sparrow Hawk	—	+	+	+
Marsh Harrier	—	+	—	—
Peregrine	—	+	+	+
Kestrel	—	+	+	+

Red Grouse	—	+	+	—
Black Grouse	+	—	—	—
Redlegged Partridge	—	+	—	—
Partridge, Grey	+	+	—	—
Pheasant	+	+	+	+
Moorhen	+	+	+	+
Coot	—	+	+	—
Oystercatcher	+	+	+	—
Ring Plover	—	+	—	—
Golden Plover	—	+	+	—
Lapwing	+	+	+	+
Little Stint	—	+	—	+
Dunlin	—	+	—	—
Ruff	—	+	—	—
Spotted Redshank	—	+	—	+
Redshank	—	+	+	+
Wood Sandpiper	—	+	—	—
Blacktailed godwit	—	+	+	—
Curlew	—	+	+	+
Snipe	—	+	+	—
Great Blackbacked Gull	—	+	+	—
Black Headed Gull	+	+	+	+
Lesser Blackbacked Gull	—	+	+	—
Herring Gull	—	+	+	+
Common Gull	+	+	+	+
Common Tern	—	+	+	+
Wood Pigeon	+	+	+	+
Collard Dove	—	—	+	+
Barn Owl	—	+	—	—
Shorteard Owl	—	—	+	—
Kingfisher, Whitibreasted	—	+	—	—
Skylark	—	+	+	+
Richards Pipit	+	+	—	—
Citrine Wagtail	—	+	—	—
Grey Wagtail	—	+	—	+
Pied Wagtil	—	+	+	+
Wren	—	—	+	+
Chiffchaff	—	+	—	—
Robin	—	+	+	+
Blackbird	+	+	+	+
Song Thrush	—	+	—	+
Mistle Thrush	—	—	+	—
Great Tit	—	+	+	+
Chaffinch	+	+	+	+
Sismik	—	—	+	—
Greenfinch	—	—	+	+
Goldfinch	—	—	—	+
House Sparrow	—	—	+	+
Tree Sparrow	—	—	+	—
Starling	+	+	+	+
Magpie	+	+	+	+
Jackdaw	+	+	—	+
Rook	+	+	—	+
Carriion Crow	—	+	+	—

APPENDIX - II

Species of Mammals Seen during the visit

Red deer	+	—	—	—
Roe deer	+	+	+	—
Stout	—	+	+	—
Rabbit	+	+	+	+
Grey Squirrel	(Seen at New Miller Dam-Wakfield)			
Red Squirrel	(Seen near Newcastle Upon Tyne)			

heatening to mention here that these birds exist in some number in certain localities of these states. (The British Ecological Society has sponsored this Project).

CHEMICAL DEFENSE IN BIRDS. L. SHYAMAL, D-206, IISc Campus, Bangalore 560 012

The first possible case of chemical defense in birds was reported recently by Jack Dumbacher in birds of the genus *Pitouhi* of New Guinea.

Dumbacher discovered the phenomenon while releasing the birds accidentally caught in mist net meant for Birds of Paradise. When his fingers got numb, he thought it was due to touching a toxic plant. However he was later able to pinpoint the source as the babbler like *Pitouhis*. The birds were known to have a strong sour odour and are called 'rubbish birds' by the New Guineans who consider it smelly and unfit to eat. Analysis of feather, skin and tissue extract proved the active principle to be Homobatrachotoxin a chemical hitherto known to be produced only by South American arrow-poison frogs (*Phyllobates* spp.) The poison could come from some local seed, berry or insect in the diet of the birds, since as Dumbacher notes, *Pitouhis* from the highlands do not seem to be as poisonous as their lowland cousins and captive reared arrow-poison frogs do not develop the toxin. Just 10 milligrams of a hooded *Pitouhi* (*Pitouhi dichrous*) skin extract injected into a mouse killed it in 20 minutes. Interestingly Jared Diamond, later wrote to NATURE that his field assistants made a meal of the birds with no ill effects.

Being poisonous is not of much survival value to a species unless advertised, say, by bright warning colouration. The *Pitouhi* is brilliantly coloured black and orange. Poisonous species are often models for non-poisonous species to imitate and Dumbacher points out that immature Greater Melampittas (*Melampitta gigantea*) resemble the Hooded *Pitouhi* in colouration. Research is on to find, for instance, how the bird avoids poisoning itself. Jack Dumbacher has decided to restrict his studies to the *Pitouhis* though he says he is tempted to 'lick other birds'.

Compiled from

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LOCAL EXTINCTION OF VULTURES IN AND AROUND THE ANAIMALAI HILLS. R. KANNAN, Hornbill Project, Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Top Slip 642 141 (via) Pollachi, T.N.

Since September 1991, I have had numerous discussions with tribals and farmers in the Anaimalai hills area

concerning the status of the Great Hornbill. Often, the discussion would stray to other species of wildlife and one group of birds, the vultures, were mentioned by so many people that I forced myself to write this note and publicize this rather disturbing piece of information.

Apparently, it is a classic case of local extinction. I've done nearly two years of heavy birding here at various elevations, but the entire vulture family does not feature in my list of 220 species of birds within the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary. Even the ubiquitous *Neophron* seems absent hereabouts. But almost every elderly person I've talked to recalls having seen jostling flocks of apparently white-backed vultures devouring wayside carcasses of cattle. They were obviously such a dominant part of the landscape until about 30 years ago. So accurate is the description these people give of the vultures' morphology and behavior - from the naked neck and "ugly" coloration to the ungainly movements, gregariousness and clumsy take-offs — that one cannot but be assured of the identity of the bird taxa in question.

So, whatever happened to all those vultures, and where have they gone? The best or most plausible answers came from the Gounders, the community of people who have monopolised agriculture and timber industry in the plains immediately around these hills for ages. They say that in the 60s and 70s chemical contaminated carcasses were laid out to kill cattle-marauding leopards venturing out of the adjoining forests. This has killed off every vulture in the area, they say. That's sad, but several other questions remain unanswered, and here is a case worthy of some enquiry. What have been the ecological effects of the extinction of such a prominent bird species? Now that, with a big sanctuary declared in the area and the chemical treatment long gone (hopefully), why have not the vultures recolonised the area? Apparently, vultures still occur in good numbers north of the Palghat gap, in the Nilgiris (C. Sivasubramanian, pers. commu.) which, as the vulture flies, is just about 50 kms to the north. Surely, we must not take any case of local extinction lightly, especially one of this magnitude.

COMMENTS ON AWB MIDWINTER WATERFOWL CENSUS, RAKESH VYAS, 2-P-22, Vigyan nagar, Kota 324005

We must compliment Dr Taej Mundkur and his team for conducting the gigantic task of the Midwinter Waterfowl Census in S.E. Asia. Much has been achieved in the last seven years in terms of identification of important wetlands, major groups of migratory waterfowl visiting India, status of resident waterfowl and the precarious state of various important wetlands of India. The time has now come to channelize our human and financial resources towards avoidance of unnecessary coverages and

increased attention towards important sites. To make my point clear, I have presented the last four years data in Table 1. It is obvious from the figures that just about 9% to 15% of all the sites counted support more than 3,000 waterfowl and account for over 70% of the total number counted in a particular year. So, these sites should form the core group for regular coverage. Earlier, it was felt that all the sites initially reported should be covered regularly to gauge the changes taking place over the years. From my experience, I know that smaller waterbodies are getting degraded due to various factors and support fewer and fewer waterfowl. Therefore, a number of such sites need to be dropped from regular coverage, and only those sites supporting over 1,000 birds should be recommended for future coverage. The analysis of the 1992 figures draw attention to the following points :-

- * 196 sites - Less than 100 waterfowl
- * 325 sites - 100-1000 waterfowl
- * 39 sites - 1000-3000 waterfowl
- * 521 sites out of 776 support only approx. 10% of the total birds counted
- * only 15% sites are of real importance

The time and, money spent on coverage of unimportant sites can be better utilized by ensuring the coverage of important sites, which are either not covered regularly or only partially covered. Some important sites, which are not regularly covered are: Kokkeru lake (AP), Kaziranga (Assam), Carambolin tank (Goa), Khambat mudflats, Thol lake, Great Rann of Kutch (Gujarat), Goregaon Bus Depot, Nathsagar Dam (Maharashtra), Keoladeo Ghana (Rajasthan), Chembarrambakkan, Viranam Eri (Tamil Nadu) and some which were partially covered include Pulicat lake (AP), Thol lake, Amipur tank (Gujarat, Nathsagar dam (Maharashtra) and Chilka lake (Orissa).

I feel that if our Regional Co-ordinators could ensure the fullest coverage of such sites through better planning and meetings with the volunteers, we can hope to achieve more accurate and exhaustive results for the Indian subcontinent. The figures presented here are manually obtained by me, but AWB Scientists with the help of computer can draw up a complete list of 'inner core' and 'core' sites for India. We have many young and enthusiastic volunteers which may be benefited by some training programmes on waterfowl identification and census techniques, as organized by Regional Co-ordinator (North), Mr Vivek Menon in New Delhi. We are grateful to AWB for providing a field guide of the waterbirds of Asia to all regular census participants.

Table 1

Year	Sites with more than 3000 birds	More than 5000 birds	More than 10,000 birds	Total	All Counted sites	Important site %
1989	33	17	32	82	650	13
1990	32	20	22	74	655	11
1991	30	20	23	73	816	9
1992	45	40	31	116	776	15

Asian Wetland Bureau

Over the last ten years, Asian Wetland bureau (AWB) has actively engaged itself in its mission of promoting the protection and sustainable utilisation of wetlands and their resources in the Asia-Pacific region. The bureau has over 30 professional staff working and supporting programme activities in over 15 countries.

AWB works in a catalytic fashion in collaboration with National Organisations, essentially helping to strengthen and develop local expertise to provide sustainable and wise use management of wetland resources.

Some of the achievements of the Bureau have been:

- (i) Collation of information on wetlands throughout the Asia Pacific region and operating a wetland information service.
- (ii) Assistance in the preparation of National Wetland Inventories in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, Thailand, Vietnam and India.
- (iii) Completion of detailed studies on peat swamp and mangrove forest throughout South East Asia, and preparation of management recommendations.
- (iv) Identification of over 40 key sites for migratory waterbirds in East Asia and providing assistance for their protection.
- (v) A five year collaborative programme with the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, involving institutional strengthening, wetland management and surveys throughout Indonesia; and supporting the development of local capacity for wetland conservation, including completion of over 40 training courses in 12 countries.
- (vi) Monitoring of development projects funded by international agencies which affect wetlands in Asia and collaboration with such agencies to minimise negative impacts.
- (vii) Preparation of guidelines for development agencies to minimise negative impact on wetlands.
- (viii) Assistance in establishment or management of many wetland reserves including Kuala Selangor Nature Park (Malaysia) and Berbak National Park (Indonesia).

- (ix) Organising regional and national workshops to develop strategies and plans for multiple sustainable use of wetland systems.

Forward Plan

In 1991/92 a new Forward Plan for 1993-1995 was prepared. It was decided that AWB will operate through interlocking geographic and thematic programmes. The established geographic programmes will be divided into: International Programme; East Asia Programme; South Asia Programme. In order to ensure that AWB's Geographic Programmes obtain the necessary support, AWB has developed thematic Programmes as follows: Information and Training Programme; Wetland Assessment and Monitoring Programme and Wetland Policy and Management Programme.

Affiliation with IWRB

The recent formal affiliation with IWRB is a development which AWB considers essential towards forming global partnerships for ensuring the protection and sustainable use of wetlands of the world. AWB has already been working with IWRB for more than five years on activities such as the Asian Waterfowl Census, Oceania Wetland Inventory, Support to the Ramsar Convention Parties and regional meetings and training courses in Malaysia and Pakistan. In the future, through combining the strength of both organisations, it is hoped that the level of wetland conservation achievement around the world will be expanded considerably.

Partnerships

AWB also cooperates closely with Ramsar Bureau, IUCN, Wetlands for the Americas, International Crane Foundation and other international organisations active in wetland conservation.

AWB South Asia Programme

In order to facilitate AWB activities in the region, it was found necessary to establish an office in South Asia. Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) of Government of India when approached, indicated its support and assistance in setting up an office in Delhi.

Details about funding, facilities, location etc., are being worked out. In the meantime, AWB has completed the formalities of setting up AWB-India, and an appropriate MOU will be drawn up to work in collaboration with a local NGO. Staff for the office will be recruited in April 93.

World Bank

AWB's other main activities in the region have so far had a low profile and have been restricted to training workshops, institution building, small grants for projects and preparation of project document-especially for the World Bank Forestry III project in Bangladesh. Some inputs were made to the components of the Bangladesh's Flood Action Plan.

Asian Waterfowl Census

From 1993, the Asian Waterfowl Census is being coordinated from AWB-HQ. This will be a part of the Wetland Assessment and Monitoring Program of the AWB, and will maintain a comprehensive database on Asian wetlands as well as technical expertise, which will be available for consultation and advice throughout Asia.

AWB Training Materials

Asian Wetland Bureau which has always been active in the training field, is currently developing a variety of training materials related to wetland assessment and management to be made available at nominal cost to individuals and institutions in the region.

This work is being developed and expanded in 3 ways; preparation of a bibliography of existing training materials, collation of a loose-leaf reference collection of training materials and writing training modules for subject areas identified as not adequately covered by existing publications.

It is anticipated that this loose-leaf file of training resources will continue to develop over the years as more materials are identified and prepared. This strategy allows for rapidly responding to specific training course needs by putting together relevant training modules suited to the course.

Several training modules, example coral reef survey methods; goose ecology study techniques; Limnological techniques; water quality survey methods; geomorphology techniques and hydrology techniques; all prepared from a wetland perspective have been produced. These and the bibliography listing all training materials are available at AWB.

Courtesy: IWRB, January 1993.

IUCN Publication

Wetlands in Danger

*General Editor: Patrick Dugan
Introduction by David Bellamy*

Wetlands are being destroyed at an alarming rate to make way for people and agriculture. If the current rate of destruction continues unchecked, many species of wildlife will disappear—some wetland birds are already on the edge of extinction. But the impact in countries whose rural population depends on wetlands can be far more serious—damming and irrigation projects can decimate fish catches, reduce floodplain harvest and by exacerbating droughts lead to increased mortality of the human population. *Wetlands in Danger* raises awareness of the human and conservation issues of these regions and revels in their exceptional beauty and enormous biodiversity.

Publication date: 30 September 1993

XXI International Ornithological Congress

Hofburg, Vienna, August 20-25, 1994

Correspondences :

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Tel: +43-1-58800-106 Fax: + 43-1-5867260

Summary

Date : August 20-25 1994

Place : Hofburg, Vienna, Austria

Costs: AS 4000 before May 31, 1994, AS 5000 thereafter.

A limited number of reduced rates, and some assistance for travel and accommodation are available upon application.

Scientific contributions in the forms of posters, poster-talks, round tables, and workshops will be accepted up to May 31, 1994. Publishable abstracts must be received by January 31, 1994.

Dear prospective participants,

"Wien ist anders!" is on the sign posts of every major road leading to Vienna. It means that there is something special going on there. This is true for many aspects of life in the city and will hopefully apply equally to the forthcoming 21st International Ornithological Congress. It should be special in depth and diversity. For the former, the historical roots actually go back to the first Ornithological Congress which was convened here in Vienna by Crown Prince Rudolf in 1884. A special aspect now, 110 years later, will be that the Congress and the city may again serve to stimulate contact between eastern and western ornithologists. The diversity is quite apparent in the scientific, ornithological and social programs: from avian neurobiology to bird conservation, the Alps to the Black Sea and art and classical music to wine evenings in century old inns. The aim is to stimulate international scientific exchange of ideas in an enjoyable environment.

Along with Vienna's own charm you'll find an extraordinary variety of cultural and environmental landscapes in the surroundings. Hence as a final point, we would heartily recommend to all participants that they take time before or after the congress to look and see what Austria and its European neighbours have to offer. You will not be disappointed.

THE ORGANIZERS

Registration

All prices are in Austrian Shillings (AS). Registration includes congress fees, proceedings and the opening and final ceremonies. Reduced rates include everything except the proceedings. Accompanying members may attend the ceremonies, afternoon and evening programs and some of the social activities.

Fees

Registration before May 31, 1994: AS 4000
Late Registration : AS 5000
Accompanying members : AS 1800
Reduced Rates : AS 3000
Children under 16 free

Payments should be made by International Bank Draft in Austrian Shillings, Mastercard, or Visa. Cancellation with complete refunding will be accepted up to four months before the congress (received by May 20) thereafter only 50% can be refunded.

Financial Aid

Two forms of financial aid will be offered at the conference, reduced registration fees and some travel and accommodation aid

Reduced rates will be given to a limited number of participants. Budgetary considerations necessitate limiting these to about 25% of the participants. These rates can apply for students, senior citizens or anyone requiring them due to financial circumstances. Letters of applications with an enrolment certificate or supporting letter from the university, department or professor for students should be forwarded with the registration to the Secretary-General.

Travel and Accommodation Assistance is available for a limited number of participants for travel to and/or accommodation in Vienna. Criteria for support include.

1. financial need 2. international balance and representation and 3. scientific contribution. Applications should be submitted to the Secretary-General before January 1, 1994. Ornithologists from developing countries and students will be given special consideration.

Scientific Contribution

The forms of contribution to the congress include invited plenaries, open lectures, symposia, posters, round table discussions and special interest groups. For all oral contributions please note that time limitations will be strictly enforced and that for slide presentations it is necessary to have glass-mounted slides because of the projector strength.

For further details please contact:

S.A. Hussain, Assistant Director, AWB, University of Malaya, Lembah Pantai, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Symposia

The following symposia topics were selected by the Scientific Program Committee (titles condensed):

Forest Bird Comm. Ecol.
Arid Zone Birds
Orientation
Mixed Species Forag.
Functional Neurob.
Cold Acclimat.
Endocr. Breed & Pubety
Brood Parasitism
Hybrid Zones
Molec. Pop. Structure
Song: Neural Aspects
Aging & Reprod.

Forest Bird Demog.
Habitat Select.
Food, Forag. & Reprod.
Memory & Percept.
Flight
Environment. Endocr.
Cooperative Breed.
Parasites
Birds: Pollut. Indicators
Attitudes to Birds
Remote Sensing
Phylogen. Ecol. Beh. Biogr.

Aging & Repord.
Passer. Migrants in Tropics
Control of Migrat.
Energetics
Phys. Constraints Migrat.
Food Choice & Nurr.
Ecol. Dispersal
Non-putat. Offspr. & Monog.
Ancestry & Origin
Mating Systems
Genet. Phenotyp Plasticity
Fire Ecol. & Conserv.

Repr. Biol. Neotrop.
Nutrition
Intellegence
Heritability & Selection
Feeding Mechanisms
Ontogeny
Ecol. & Evol. of Leks
Respon. to Human Activ.
Systematics
Shore Birds & Conservation
Molecul. Systemat.
Forest Mang.

Changing Scenario of Bird Ecology & Conservation

Bangalore

12-14 November 1993



The preparation for the first National Seminar on Bird Ecology and Conservation scheduled for November, 93 (12-14th) is well on its right course, thanks to an enthusiastic hand of bird watchers in Bangalore and other parts of Karnataka. The favourable responses, abstracts and enquiries from all over India, is a sure indication, that bird enthusiasts all over the country are geared to this great event.

Needless to remind, it is for the first time that a seminar of this nature is being envisaged, wherein all interested - be it a beginner or an advanced professional - are coming on to one platform, to greet, encourage and educate one another.

Unlike other seminars this one is unique in many ways, some of which are as follows :

1. There is no partitioning between an amateur and professional (We know well that amateurs have contributed more to India Ornithology!).
2. There is going to be a mid-seminar field trip to just be with the birds, and get that feeling of birds birdwatchers integration!
3. A parallel exhibition in the heart of the city for a full week, combining bird philately, art, photography, with all the participants of the seminar playing special hosts to the public. This is a focal point of generating public goodwill and support for bird conservation programmes.
4. In the midst of sylvan surroundings of the Aranya Bhavan, combined with Bangalore hospitality and

Karnataka cuisine, there is an air of openness to build relationships and goodwill, to harmoniously foster conservation movement for birds.

5. The seminar will bring together policy makers, planners, foresters, environmentalists, scientists, amateurs, artists, photographers, nature lovers, farmers and even those who are 'just interested!' Indeed, this is going to be a seminar with a holistic approach.

For those who have sent abstracts :

As soon as you hear from us, please send in your full papers, as we hope to bring out the proceedings by the first day of the seminar. Now, isn't that again unique?

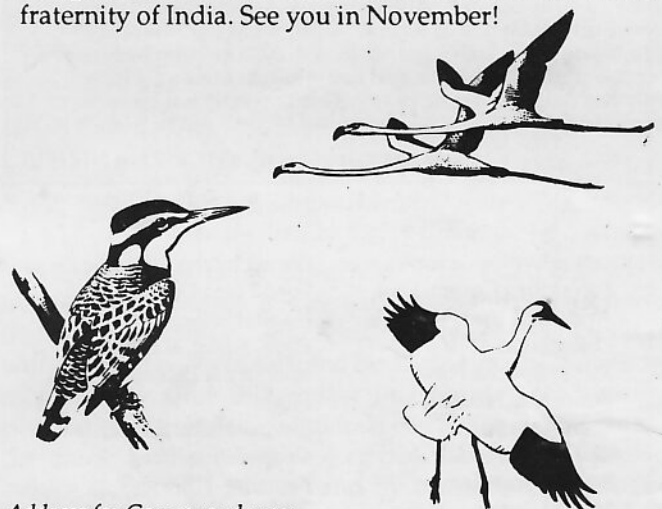
Those of you who are still planning abstracts, notes, observations of interest, regional notes and sightings, review, popular articles, etc. please cooperate by sending us the same before August 31st, along with registration fees.

Registration Fees:

Before August 31'93	Rs. 200	For Students	Rs.100
After August 31'93	Rs. 250	For Students	Rs.150

If you can generate donations, we will be highly grateful, as the seminar expenses are very high with high cost of printing, transport, catering, etc.

Please enlist participation from your own regions. Bring a novice and add a birdwatcher to the bird lovers' fraternity of India. See you in November!



Address for Correspondence:

OSI, Liaison Office

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